



CITY OF HOUSTON

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August 23, 2021

The Honorable Trent Ashby
Chairman, Constitutional Rights and Remedies
Select Committee
P.O. Box 2910 Austin, TX 78768

Dear Chairman Ashby and Committee Members,

I appreciate the opportunity to again offer testimony on voting restrictions under consideration by the Texas Legislature.

On Friday, August 6, the City of Houston dedicated a new downtown monument to the 36th President of the United States, Lyndon Baines Johnson. It was not a coincidence that this ceremony took place on the 56th anniversary of the signing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The law was later reauthorized and strengthened under Presidents Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and George W. Bush. In 2006, the last time the law was re-authorized, the U.S. Senate passed it with a unanimous vote, including current Senators Mitch McConnell, John Thune, Lisa Murkowski, and Susan Collins.

How has voting access, something that was once universally embraced, turned into something one party has abandoned?

Keith Ingram, the director of the elections division of the Texas Secretary of State, testified before the Legislature that, "in spite of all circumstances, Texas had an election that was smooth and secure. Texans can be justifiably proud of the hard work and creativity shown by local county elections officials."

The same Secretary of State's office approved plans for drive-through voting and 24-hour voting for Harris County in 2020. Drive-through services have been used for banking, medicine, and "to-go" food since the first half of the 20th century. Twenty four-hour services are as familiar to Texans as Whataburger. These common, convenient, and popular services that help increase access are now being targeted by this legislation, with no – I repeat NO – evidence of fraud regarding their execution.

Online voter registration is a common practice that has been approved by 41 states and offers convenience and security. Just as electronic medical records have helped reduce errors, red and blue states across the nation have responded to public demands that voting technology keep pace with the modern world.

Texas, after years of defiance, is only now complying with the “motor voter” requirements of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 after losing a lengthy court case. Texas voters need the State of Texas to catch up.

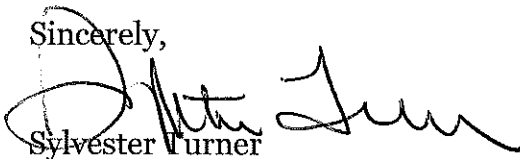
On election night in Harris County, one Democratic Texas House member lost to a Republican challenger, and one Republican Texas House member lost to a Democratic challenger. Many members of this body celebrated this result, so it again begs the question; why are voting restrictions suddenly such a priority?

Members of the party that control the House, Senate and Governor’s office are able to steamroll minority objections and pass ill-conceived legislation. But, when historians look back at these efforts, there will not be any monuments planned or anniversaries celebrated. In a state with one of the lowest voter turnout rates in the country, further limiting voting access is simply un-American.

Let’s be honest with what these bills have been about. This is about power. Holding it. Using it. Keeping it.

History will not judge kindly those who abused their power to reverse decades of progress. Texas needs to move forward on civil rights and voting access, not backwards.

Sincerely,



Sylvester Turner
Mayor